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## APPENDIX B: ACCREDITATION

### A. Overview

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1. *What is museum accreditation?*

In the United States the American Association of Museums (AAM) operates a museum accreditation program. The program assesses how well a museum meets current professional standards. The assessment process involves self-study by the museum as well as peer review. The AAM Accreditation Commission, composed of appointed members of the museum community, grants accreditation status to museums that meet the generally accepted standards. The Commission reviews an accredited museum's status every five to ten years.
2. *What institutions are eligible to apply?*

Applicants must meet eligibility criteria and demonstrate the characteristics of an accreditable museum as published by the AAM. See Section A.9 for information on how to obtain these criteria and characteristics.

Park museums that have been open for at least two years, have public exhibits, and are operating according to NPS policies and procedures are likely to meet the AAM accreditation eligibility criteria.

In addition, NPS requires that parks meet the following requirements before applying for accreditation:

  - All collections are accessioned.
  - All collections are cataloged *or* the park has an approved Resources Management Plan that addresses cataloging of the backlog.
  - Collections are adequately stored, secured, and protected by fire detection and suppression systems, *or* the park has an approved Resources Management Plan and other plans, as necessary, that address the correction of deficiencies identified on the Checklist for Preservation and Protection of Museum Collections.
  - An approved Scope of Collection Statement is in effect.
  - Exhibits are relevant to the park mission and adequately maintained.
3. *Why should my park museum apply for accreditation?*

Accreditation provides review and recognition of your park's museum programs and operations by the museum profession. It offers the benefits of ongoing critical self-evaluation and peer review. The public recognition that accreditation provides attracts volunteers and visitors. It also facilitates loans, travelling exhibitions, and fund raising to support park museum operations.

4. *How does being part of a larger organization (NPS) affect accreditation for my park museum?*

Being part of the NPS facilitates the review of your park museum. This is because a servicewide review of NPS policies and procedures has already occurred. When Harpers Ferry NHP was accredited in June 1994, the accreditation team also reviewed the museum-related functions in the Washington Office (including what is now the National Center for Cultural Resources Stewardship and Partnership Programs and the Museum Management Program), the National Capital Region, and the Harpers Ferry Center. The servicewide review was a renewal of a review that occurred in 1985 with accreditation of Independence NHP. The review facilitates future AAM accreditation reviews in parks.

**Note:** The AAM may choose to review the Support Office (SO) and/or Regional Office in conjunction with a park accreditation review if these offices have not been reviewed in the past ten years. See Section B, Step 7a.

5. *What does accreditation involve?*

The accreditation process involves the following steps:

- Park consults with SO or Regional Curator about accreditation.
- Park requests and Regional Director grants approval to apply (or identifies improvements needed).
- Park submits accreditation application form and fee to AAM.
- Park completes self-study.
- AAM Accreditation Commission reviews self-study and approves (or tables or denies) the application.
- Park selects an on-site Visiting Committee after the Commission approves the self-study.
- Visiting Committee visits park.
- Visiting Committee submits report to AAM Accreditation Commission.
- Accreditation Commission reviews the report and recommends accreditation (or tabling or denial).
- AAM initiates mandatory subsequent review of accreditation within five to ten years.

See Section B for step-by-step procedures to complete the accreditation process.

6. *How long will accreditation take?*

Generally, the accreditation process requires two and one half to three years. The process varies for each museum depending on such factors as the:

- time the park takes to prepare the documents
- results of Accreditation Commission reviews (if tabling, denials, or

appeals are involved)

- time required to schedule the Visiting Committee

7. *How much will accreditation cost my park?*

The accreditation process represents a significant commitment of park staff time. In addition, the park pays accreditation fees and travel expenses.

Upon application, the park pays:

- a non-refundable application fee (\$200 subject to change)
- the first year's annual participation fee (\$200 subject to change)

When the Visiting Committee is scheduled, the park pays:

- the travel expenses for the Visiting Committee

Each year after application, even if the park has not yet been accredited, and as long as the park remains active in the program, the park pays:

- the annual participation fee (\$200 subject to change)

8. *What funds are available for accreditation?*

Parks may use appropriated funds and donated funds, including cooperating association funds, to pay accreditation fees.

9. *Where can I get an application and further information?*

Contact the AAM for an application by calling or writing:

AAM Accreditation Office  
1575 Eye Street, NW  
Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-289-9116  
e-mail: [accreditation@aam-us.org](mailto:accreditation@aam-us.org)

You may access further information on the AAM Accreditation Program on the World Wide Web at <http://www.aam-us.org/accred.htm>.

You may also order an Accreditation Resource Kit that includes:

- ***A Higher Standard: The Museum Accreditation Handbook***—the definitive guide to the accreditation process and a preview of what is expected of an accredited institution
- ***The Accreditation Self-Study Guide***—a framework for the institution to conduct self-evaluation of its operations and for application to the accreditation program
- ***The Accreditation Self-Study Diskette***—3 ½ inch diskette for IBM versions of Microsoft Word

To order the kit by mail, by telephone, or on-line, contact the AAM at:

AAM Bookstore

1575 Eye Street, NW  
Suite 400  
Washington, DC 20005  
202-289-9127  
<<http://www.aam-us.org/text/bookstore.htm>>

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## **B. Accreditation Step-by-Step**

### *Step 1 Consultation*

Consult with the SO or Regional Curator about the park's readiness to apply for accreditation. Confirm that the park meets AAM and NPS eligibility criteria. See Section A.2. If the park doesn't meet the eligibility criteria, correct the deficiencies and repeat Step 1.

Note: During the application or accreditation process the park, SO or Regional Office, or the Accreditation Commission may identify deficiencies that the park needs to correct before going to the next step.

### *Step 2 Regional Director Approval*

Request Regional Director approval to apply for accreditation. The Regional Director, upon the recommendation of the SO or Regional Curator, grants approval for the park to apply for accreditation, or identifies deficiencies that the park needs to correct.

### *Step 3 Application*

Get the application form and information from the AAM. Consult with the SO or Regional Curator and submit the application and fees to the AAM. See Section A.7.

### *Step 4 Self-Study*

The AAM sends the Accreditation Self-Study questionnaire to the park. Complete the self-study in consultation with the SO or Regional Curator. Submit the self-study and supporting documents to the AAM. You must complete the self-study within one year of the application.

### *Step 5 Accreditation Commission Review of Self-Study*

The Accreditation Commission reviews the self-study and assigns one of the following statuses:

- *Interim Approval* for the park to proceed to the next step
- *Tabled* for specific deficiencies to be corrected within six months or one year
- *Tabled* for further information (until the next meeting of the Commission)
- *Denial* with option of appeal

### *Step 6 Selection of Visiting Committee*

Work with the SO or Regional Curator and the AAM staff to select a Visiting Committee from the AAM roster of peer reviewers. The committee is usually composed of two individuals.

<i>Step 7</i> <i>Visiting Committee Visits Park</i>	The Visiting Committee visits the park. The park pays travel costs for the committee.
<i>Step 7a</i> <i>Visiting Committee May Visit SO and/or Regional Office</i>	<p>The Visiting Committee may visit the SO and/or Regional Office if the park is the first in the Region to apply for accreditation, or if ten years have passed since the SO and/or Regional Office were visited. The SO and/or Regional Office pay the associated travel costs.</p> <p>Note: To assess a park within the context of the total organization the appropriate SO and/or Regional Office must be evaluated once every ten years. This review involves all functions that provide support to the park museum programs, including administration, resource management, and interpretation. The Visiting Committee will identify, with the SO and/or Regional Office staff, the functional areas that the committee will review.</p>
<i>Step 8</i> <i>Visiting Committee Report</i>	The Visiting Committee submits its report to the AAM Accreditation Commission
<i>Step 9</i> <i>Accreditation Commission Review</i>	<p>The Accreditation Commission reviews the report and recommends one of the following statuses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Accreditation</i> (usually for ten years, but may be granted for only five years if the Commission has concerns)</li> <li>• <i>Tabled</i> for specific deficiencies to be corrected within six months or one year</li> <li>• <i>Tabled</i> for further information (until the next meeting of the Commission)</li> <li>• <i>Denial</i> with option of appeal</li> </ul>
<i>Step 10</i> <i>Subsequent Accreditation</i>	On a cycle of ten (or five) years, as specified at the time of accreditation, the AAM notifies the park of the need to review the park's accredited status. This review involves Steps 4-9. (The Accreditation Office reviews the self-study in Step 5 rather than the Commission.) This process is called subsequent accreditation.